

Priest won't stop push for women's ordination

by [Bruce Nolan](#) in the [September 6, 2011](#) issue

The Roman Catholic priest who faces expulsion from the priesthood and his religious order for advocating for women priests is refusing to recant and has hired a church lawyer.

"What they're asking me to do is lie," Roy Bourgeois said in an interview on August 9 from his home in Columbus, Georgia. "To say I don't believe God calls women to the priesthood as well as men—I cannot do that."

In 2008 Bourgeois participated in a ceremony in Kentucky purporting to ordain Janice Sevre-Duszynska as a Catholic priest. The church said it was without effect, but that Bourgeois nonetheless incurred automatic excommunication by participating. That means he is cut off from the sacraments, although he remains a priest.

At the same time, a process began to unfold that could end with Bourgeois's forced laicization, or being stripped of his priesthood and expelled from the Maryknoll order, his home for 44 years.

Bourgeois's Maryknoll superior, Edward Dougherty, issued on July 27 the last written warning required by church law before sending Bourgeois's case to Rome. Dougherty advised Bourgeois he would forward the case to Rome for laicization "if you fail to publicly recant and retract your stand on this issue of women's ordination" by August 11.

The Catholic Church teaches that Christ defined the priesthood as an all-male corps

modeled on himself, and it is powerless to change that. Bourgeois said he has retained Tom Doyle, a Dominican priest famous for his support of sexual abuse victims and his criticisms of bishops, as his canon lawyer.

His defense is the primacy of his conscience and his right to dissent, Bourgeois said. But a friend and secular lawyer said August 9 he hoped that Bourgeois might retain his priesthood, short of recanting.

Bill Quigley, a law professor at Loyola University in New Orleans, said Bourgeois has promised his Maryknoll community that he will not participate again in rites purporting to ordain Catholic women to the priesthood—although not to recant or silence himself on the issue.

"An issue as important as this, we've got to be able at least to have dialogue without getting kicked out," Quigley said. Quigley notes that Bourgeois has attracted substantial support among fellow priests both within and outside the order—not necessarily for women's ordination, but for his right to offer his public opinion without loss of his priesthood.

Mike Virgintino, a Maryknoll spokesman, said that Dougherty months ago slow-tracked the process to give Bourgeois maximum time to reconsider his position.

Having taken a vow of poverty, Bourgeois has lived for years on a Maryknoll allowance in a small apartment near Fort Benning, Georgia. For 20 years he has protested against a military installation there once called the School of the Americas, now called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.

Virgintino said that if Bourgeois is expelled, the order will nonetheless continue to provide for him financially. —RNS